

**Testimony on Reform of the Sex Offender Registry and other Recommendations of
the Special Committee on Sex Offenders
Hearing of the Judiciary Committee
Monday, March 26, 2018
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Senator Doyle, Senator Kissel, Representative Tong, and members of the Committee, thank you for hearing my testimony today in support of reform of the sex offender registry and other recommendations made by the Special Committee on Sex Offenders under the auspices of the Sentencing Commission.

I was pleased to participate in the work of the Special Committee on Sex Offenders on behalf of my organization, the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness. Through numerous hearings over two years, members of the Committee had the opportunity to take a wide-angle view of our current system to manage sex offenders and prevent sex offenses. The committee received presentations from top experts who shared their insights, interpreted for us the most recent scientific data, and offered suggestions to improve Connecticut's system to prevent and respond to sex offenses. The proposals put forward by the Committee, informed by the ideas of some of the best national experts in this area, would enhance public safety in Connecticut by both improving our work as a state to manage sex offenders, reducing the risk of repeat or new sex offenses, and strengthening our efforts to prevent these terrible crimes.

As you are aware, under the proposal of the Special Committee, the categories of sex offenders who must register with the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection (DESPP) based on the crime for which they were convicted remain the same. However, the length of time on the registry and whether an individual is included on a public registry or a law enforcement-only registry will be determined by evaluating the registrant's **risk of reoffending**, understood through the use of validated actuarial risk assessment instruments.

In these challenging fiscal times, all areas of government – including law enforcement – must deploy available resources to the very best effect. The proposed changes offered by the Special Committee would result in a more targeted registry. The current registry is inadequate in that it fails to differentiate between offenders at high risk of re-offense, as opposed to those at low risk of re-offense. The proposed system would focus resources,

including existing treatment resources, on high-risk offenders who warrant the close attention of probation and parole, law enforcement, and the public.

Furthermore, the proposed system would correct for the unintended consequences of our current management system, consequences which are likely increasing – rather than decreasing – the likelihood of re-offense by certain sex offenders who are included on the registry.

Experts in the field of sex offender management cite the fact that housing stability, in particular, can be an important component of “dynamic risk” with regard to an offender’s likelihood of committing a new offense. Alissa Ackerman, a University of Washington criminologist, has cited the fact that because sex-offender registration makes finding a job and housing more difficult, offenders feel angrier and more stressed: her research indicates that these negative emotions drive up recidivism rates.¹ Similarly, the California Sex Offender Management Board states the following:

“...a substantial body of research now links criminality to life stability – an inverse relationship. An unstable life leads to increased problems with the law and with increased criminal recidivism. Of course life instability is unavoidably linked with housing instability.”²

In 2016, researchers from the California and Canadian justice departments reviewed the records of more than 1,600 California sex offenders on probation or parole. They found relatively low rates of sex-crime recidivism (less than 5% during the study’s five-year follow-up period). However, those experiencing homelessness were over four times more likely to commit a repeat sex crime than those who were not. The researchers concluded that: “Collectively, transient status seems to be associated with higher sexual recidivism rates.”³

The proposal before you takes into account this data, as well as other recent scientific findings, which we can employ to enhance the public security of children, women, and men across Connecticut by improving our sex offender management system.

At the same time, the proposal makes significant recommendations regarding how Connecticut can improve our efforts to educate the public and law enforcement, alike, regarding sexual assault, and the ways in which we can work more effectively to prevent

¹ Yoder, Stephen, “New evidence says US sex-offender policies are actually causing more crime,” Quartz, <https://qz.com/869499/new-evidence-says-us-sex-offender-policies-dont-work-and-are-actually-causing-more-crime/>

² Lee, Seung C. et al, “The Predictive Validity of Static-99R for Sexual Offenders in California: 2016 Update,” www.saratso.org/docs/ThePredictiveValidity_of_Static-99R_forSexualOffenders_inCalifornia-2016v1.pdf

³ Ibid.

sexual assault across our communities. **The report's recommendations should be considered in their totality, and as a package.**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important proposal. Thank you for your work to reduce sex offenses in Connecticut and to strengthen public safety. I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

